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ABSTRACT

As part of the Michigan Adult Education Inquiry Project, five adult education practitioners from three metropolitan school districts investigated the application of computer technology in adult education administration. The research focused on finding out how technology can assist administrators in a more efficient performance of their duties. Through a literature search, five management functions were identified: planning, directing, organizing, staffing, and evaluating. Three technology applications were applied to refine and enhance the functions of management: computer-based communications; management information system technology; and desktop applications software. Several barriers to implementation of computer technology were identified, such as lack of technology support from the school district for adult education and expecting teachers to teach new software programs without training or the hardware to run the programs. To be successful, adult education administrators need to support access to and use of information and knowledge tools, be willing to train and retrain themselves and their staff, and find creative ways to solve hardware and software shortages. (KC)

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TECHNOLOGY:

A New Paradigm for Adult Education Administrators

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as participants in the
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ABSTRACT

As a part of the Michigan Adult Education Inquiry Project II (MAEPIP), five adult education practitioners from three metropolitan school districts investigated the application of computer technology in adult education administration. Five management functions were identified:

*planning
*directing
*organizing
*staffing
*evaluating

Three technology applications were applied to refine and enhance the functions of management:

*computer-based communications
*management information system technology
*desktop applications software

Several barriers to implementation of computer technology were identified. The purpose of the research was to assist administrators in performing their duties more efficiently.

TECHNOLOGY: A NEW PARADIGM FOR ADULT EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

Introduction

Technology is racing ahead at a mind boggling speed and adult education administrators are expected to keep on top of it all. The concern/need that this practitioner inquiry research project focused on was how prepared are adult education administrators to compete in the race?

The focus of this practitioner inquiry research project was the mutual concern shared by representatives of three different school districts from the metropolitan Detroit area. Our original questions were:

1. How prepared are adult education administrators to deal with the technological needs of their programs?
2. How you spend your technology dollars and maximize your return?
3. Why are adult education managers technologically illiterate?

Our literature search revealed that there has been very little research done to help answer these questions. However, what we were able to find was information regarding improving administrative efficiency using technology. Therefore, our new question is how can technology assist administrators in a more efficient performance of their duties.

Management Functions

In order to better understand how technology can assist administrators in the performance of their duties, a clear understanding of the management functions of the adult education administrator are essential.

Dennis Porter in his book, The Strategic Management of Public Service Organizations (1987) identifies five key adult education management functions: 1) Planning; 2) Directing, facilitating, and empowering personnel; 3) Organizing work to meet desired results; 4) Staffing; and 5) Evaluating.

Planning includes the processes of forecasting, determining direction, making an action plan, and allocating resources. For example, projecting changes in demographics and the impact it will have on budgeting, scheduling, and curriculum development is a critical first step to a successful adult education program.

Directing, facilitating, and empowering personnel requires an adult education administrator to analyze problems, make decisions, and effectively communicate. For example, a good administrator needs to have the ability to collect and analyze data, determine a direction, and delegate and disseminate the results.

Organizing work to meet desired results entails providing a framework in which to operate. Adult education administrators need to establish a work environment that maintains relationships with their staff, their colleagues, and most importantly, the community/customers. Using this organizational technique will ultimately result in a quality adult education program that is responsive to the community's needs.

Staffing requires administrators to select, train, and develop their personnel. In order to maintain a highly motivated and professionally current and competent staff, regular inservicing must be a priority of the administrator's agenda.

Evaluating involves determining standards, monitoring, and enhancing performance. Continuous improvement is a cycle of goal setting, measuring, evaluating, and resetting goals. The adult education administrator is responsible for facilitating this process for him/herself, the staff, and the community.

Technology Applications

Appropriate technologies can be used to refine and enhance each of these management functions.

According to Dennis Porter three sets of technology applications are of interest to the administrator. They include: 1) computer-based communications; 2) management information system technology; and 3) desktop applications software.

Computer-based communications is a focus on electronic mail, digital file transmission, and computer networking. In keeping with this technological application, the development of the Michigan Adult Learning Link (MALL) appears to be an initial effort on the part of the State Department of Education Office of Extended Learning Services to open to all adult education administrators and their programs the exchange between adult education programs and the state.

Management information system technology is a data based system that has the ability to retain records ranging from student files, class rosters, course listings, mailing lists, equipment inventories, personnel records, and accounting systems. The advantage of a system such as this for the administrator is the ease of access to these kinds of information.

Desktop applications software includes a wide range of software applications designed to support the administrator and the adult education staff. Examples of the software applications include wordprocessing, spreadsheets, graphic and design tools, and instructional/tutorial programs, etc.

Basic skills enhancement and wordprocessing are the two main uses of computer software in adult education classrooms as identified by the MAEPIP I Technology Group, June, 1994; but the primary respondents to the survey were teachers. The survey did not address the issue of software necessary for an adult education administrator to organize, market, and compile data necessary to efficiently manage an adult education program.

Barriers

The introduction of technological change into a traditionally based paradigm does not come without resistance or struggle. In our research a number of barriers to implementation of computer technology in adult education programs became apparent. From reading and anecdotal reports of colleagues following is a summary of difficulties that must be recognized and resolved for improvement of adult education programs.

One barrier that was widely acknowledged was that district technology support does not extend to adult education or adult education is at the bottom of the priority list. Consequently, adult education is either technologically in the dark, in arrears or trying to find the funds to outsource their own problems. This may explain why directing and planning is difficult for adult education administrators and in most cases not occurring as efficiently as it could. The MAEPIP I Technology Group, June, 1994 Attachment C, came to a similar conclusion in their survey. By describing a hypothetical problem solution for an existing school district in Michigan, the technology exists today to implement the solution. Yet, it is not recognized, therefore not occurring.

As pointed out, administrators need to organize their work to meet desired results. It was reported by a large metropolitan adult education organization that a new management information system was implemented in the Fall, 1994. The goal was to provide financial integrity by providing accounting of spending and managing spending within the given limits. It was not until six months later that the hardware was readied and

installed for use and the staff trained. Unfortunately, the complete program is still not fully operational. The transfer of records is more than a year behind. This impacted the ability to purchase supplies for the 1995-96 school year, generate reports, and pay vendors.

A repeated concern expressed by colleagues is the hiring or use of staff in the technical instructional areas. Teachers are frustrated at being hired to teach a specific set of software and when it is improved or replaced expected to be experts on the new versions without training or experience with the software, let alone the hardware necessary to run the programs. In addition, administrators are expecting teachers or clerical staff to shore up their own lack of expertise with both software and hardware. This places additional responsibilities and stress on their already overworked staff.

Trying to evaluate staff, programs, and students is an arduous and tedious process. This was the consensus of our sources. What was noted is that these tasks are still primarily done by hand and available technology is used primarily as an electronic filing cabinet. Being on-line with staff, let alone state and national organizations, for adult education programs is rare or unheard of. Yet, the 1994 MAEPIP Technology Report and many articles and journals state this is a practical necessity. The barriers to being on-line seem to be a lack of expertise, hardware, software, and motivation. When the K-12 programs are on-line routinely, adult education programs are told "you don't need it", "we can't afford it", or "someday". This particular concern was quite emotional for many of the people who shared with us.

Conclusion

The majority of the data that was collected came from literary research and anecdotal interviews. Looking at the barriers and our question, "How can technology assist administrators in a more efficient performance of their duties?", we came to these conclusions.

Adult education administrators will continue to muddle with changing technology. If administrators support access to and use of information and knowledge tools, are willing to train/retrain themselves and their staff, and find creative ways to solve hardware/software shortages, they will be winners. This type of administrator will change the adult education administrative paradigm as well as the adult education program model.

Suggestions

We would like to suggest and think it strongly advisable that future MAEPIP participants explore this issue further by conducting a survey of Michigan adult education administrators. The survey instrument should include questions in regard to management functions, technology applications and barriers that are applicable to current adult education administration duties. The results should provide additional support to the question posed in this project.

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